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For Immediate Release: December 9, 2005  
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**State Fire Marshal Offers Winter Holiday Safety Tips**  
*Decorate With Safety in Mind*

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, "The approaching winter holidays is a terrible time for tragedy to strike, yet this is the time of year when many fatal fires and exposure to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide occur." He added, "Decorate with safety in mind."

*On December 22, 2004, at 8:57 p.m., the Worcester Fire Department was called to a structure fire in a 3-unit apartment building. Holiday decorations placed too close to a gas stove in the living room were ignited by the radiated heat. Smoke detectors alerted the occupants. The fire was confined to the living room and caused \$500 in damage.*

**Prevent Candle Fires: Follow the Circle of Safety Rules**

"So many of our holiday rituals involve candles, so we need to be especially careful with them at this time of year," Coan said.

*On December 14, 2004, at 10:35 p.m., the Reading Fire Department was called to a fire in a single-family home. Candles from a menorah were left burning unattended in the living room when the family went upstairs to bed, and ignited a nearby couch. Smoke detectors activated and woke up the mother who discovered the fire and got every one out of the house safely to their meeting place. She says she remembered what the family had learned and practiced from materials sent home from school by the fire department's S.A.F.E. Program.*

"When candles come in contact with holiday decorations, are left burning unattended, burn down too close to the holder, or are knocked over by pets or children, fires start easily and spread quickly," Marshal Coan warned. "Please burn candles inside of a one-foot *Circle of Safety*, free of anything that can burn," he added.

*On December 4, 2004, at 9:28 p.m., the Scituate Fire Department was called to a fire in a single-family home when a candle ignited a plastic decoration. Fortunately smoke detectors alerted the occupants and no one was injured.*

*On December 5, 2004, at 6:40 p.m., the Westfield Fire Department was called to a fire in a single-family home. The fire was started when candles from a homemade Christmas decoration ignited the plastic wreath. The fire was confined to the breezeway but spread to a nearby lampshade, drapes and a table. The total estimated dollar loss was \$1,300.*

### **Electric Holiday Lights**

Purchase new lights that are listed by an approved testing agency such as Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM). Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions.

Check lights carefully for frayed wires, broken plugs or sockets and loose connections. Hanukkah and Christmas lights are used year after year. Discarding and replacing damaged lights is less expensive than having a fire. When putting lights on a Christmas tree, make sure the bulb itself is not touching the tree. Keep decorations that use bulbs away from items such as curtains that could catch fire.

*On December 21, 2004, at 6:44 p.m., the Mansfield Fire Department was called to a structure fire in a single-family home. An electrical problem in the living room ignited a plastic holiday decoration. Smoke detectors were present and notified the occupants but two firefighters were injured battling this fire. Total estimated dollar loss was \$277,400*

Turn off your tree lights and electric decorations whenever you leave the house and when you go to bed at night. Lights can short circuit or overheat and start a fire. Avoid overloading extension cords, a common cause of fires, by using no more than three strands of lights on a single extension cord. Remember to never put cords under rugs or behind furniture that can "pinch" them.

### **Cut Tree Safety**

- Water your live tree every day.
- Buy a cut tree as fresh as possible. A newly cut tree properly cared for, can stay green and fire safe for several weeks.
- Never use a cut tree in a place of public assembly (such as an office, apartment or hotel lobby, restaurant, etc.).
- Turn off the lights when you leave the house or go to bed for the night.
- Never use lighted candles as decorations.

### **Christmas Tree Fires Infrequent But Deadly**

Since people stopped putting lit candles on Christmas trees and standards were set for electric lights, the number of Christmas tree fires has been significantly reduced. However, the National Fire Protection Association reports that those Christmas tree fires that do occur tend to be extremely dangerous. On average, one of every 22 reported home Christmas tree fires in the nation resulted in a death. Last holiday season there were two significant Christmas tree fires in Massachusetts that caused nearly one-half million dollars in damages to two homes and two injuries.

*On December 27, 2004, at 5:20 a.m., the Stoughton Fire Department was dispatched to a fire in a single-family home. The family's Christmas tree, situated too close to a wood stove in*

*the living room, ignited. The fire quickly spread to multiple rooms in the house. There were no detectors present and two people were injured in this fire. Damage to the home was estimated to be \$300,000.*

*On December 28, 2004, at 8:38 a.m., the Bellingham Fire Department was called to investigate a Christmas tree fire in a single-family home that had self-extinguished. The occupants had left the lights on the tree lit when they left the home. The tree had been up since the Saturday after Thanksgiving and was likely very dry. Smoke detectors were present and operated but no one was home at the time of the fire. Damages were estimated to be \$80,000.*

### **How to Select a Tree**

Lift the tree and tap the butt on the ground. If green needles fall off, the tree is too dry! Grab a branch near the top and pull your hand along it slowly. Needles should not fall off. The tree is already quite dry if you bend a needle and it breaks before bending in half.

### **Putting Up the Tree**

Make a fresh cut an inch or two off the bottom to help with absorption, right before placing it in the stand. A tree will try to “heal its wound” by enclosing the previous cut in sap and this hinders water absorption.

Place your tree in a non-tip style stand with wide feet. Make sure it cannot be tipped over by children or pets. Use extra wires if needed.

### **Placing the Tree**

Put trees and other decorations out of the way of traffic. Keep doorways and exits clear.

Place your tree and other decorations away from heaters, fireplaces, candles and all other sources of heat and flame. Heat makes your tree dry out faster and any heat source could make it catch fire.

### **Dispose of Your Tree Carefully**

Remove your tree soon after the holidays. A dry tree is fuel for a fire both inside and outside your house. An abandoned tree is frequently attractive to vandals so take advantage of your community’s pick-up day if available.

### **Artificial Trees**

Select an artificial tree with a flame retardant label. These are best for families who want a tree but will be away for several days or who may otherwise not be able to care properly for a live tree. Do not use electric lights on metal trees; faulty lights could charge the tree and electrocute anyone who touched it. Spotlights provide safer and more effective illumination.

For more information on fire safety, contact your local fire department or the Office of the State Fire Marshal at 1-877-9 NO FIRE or on-line at [www.state.ma.us/dfs](http://www.state.ma.us/dfs).